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## LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

THE Central Intelligence Agency seems at times to be the only really intelligent agency we have. Consider the record: The C.I.A. has done more for culture than the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities or the Ford Foundation, publishing highbrow journals in London, Berlin, Paris, and Bombay. It has subsidized student organizations that have formed the nucleus of the anti-war movement and have contributed greatly to the movement's leadership. While the Departments of State and Defense were giving moral and military support to the Portuguese imperialists in Africa, the C.I.A. was said to be covertly and quite effectively aiding the rebels in Angola and Mozambique. To be sure, in Cuba and Vietnam, the C.I.A. hasn't done too well, but you can't win them all. Anyway, it now seems to have surpassed itself—at least in independence and courage—by blowing the whistle on Melvin Laird and his braided alarmists in the Pentagon. It has disputed publicly the official view of the "missile crisis," and while it would be premature to say that it has destroyed the government's case, the presumption must always be that the government's case is overstated to begin with.

The issues here are not particularly complex or technical, though they are, one might say, rather abstract. Much depends on how one evaluates the significance of empty space—in this case, holes in the ground around Moscow. These holes have been seen and counted and measured by our spies on the ground and by our satellites in orbit. The big question is: Why are they there and what are they for? According to Secretary Laird, in a television appearance last March, the intelligence that had reached him confirmed "the fact that the Soviet Union is going forward with construction of a large missile system." By April 22nd, the confirmed fact was, he said, a "sobering" one: the Soviet Union was "involved in a new—and apparently extensive—ICBM construction program." In other words, the Russians were once again playing dirty pool. While sweet-talking at the SALT negotiations, they were digging holes for great big missiles that could sneak right past and around our

sleep—or, at any rate, those of us who live in Montana, North Dakota, Wyoming, and Missouri. In late April, prospects looked bad for the SALT talks, despite the encouraging words of Brezhnev, who made everything sound very simple when, in Tbilisi, he said, "All you have to do is to muster resolve to try the proposals that interest you by their taste. Translated into diplomatic language, this means 'Start negotiations.'" All very well, but how can a gentleman negotiate with a cad who is digging bigger and bigger holes on Soviet soil?

Now comes the C.I.A. to strike a blow for sanity and peace. Essentially, its argument is that you can't judge a hole by its size. It does not dispute the military's finding that there are large new cavities in the earth in the environs of Moscow. Nor does it question the possibility that the larger holes could be used to house larger missiles. But it does point out that they could also be used to pour concrete in to protect the smaller missiles they already have. Should this be the case, then it would seem unlikely that the Soviet Union is aiming at what down here in the capital we call a "first-strike capability"—i.e., a sure-fire knockout punch delivered before the song has sounded. The C.I.A. analysts (who, incidentally, leaked their misgivings and suspicions to Republicans in the Senate) do not prejudge the case, though they do suggest that if the Russians were building great big new missiles, they would be unlikely to plant them in fields of smaller ones. In any case, the C.I.A. has once again challenged Conventional Wisdom. One is particularly taken with the statement of Dr. Herbert Scoville, Jr., described as a "former" C.I.A. official, who said before the Senate Appropriations Committee, "We must ask ourselves how many times we are going to allow the 'weaponers' to come before the Congress and the people shouting 'missile gap' when in reality they are only creating another 'credibility gap.'"

—RICHARD H. ROVERE

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